

Foster Care and Adoption

S U C C E S S F U L F A M I L I E S

Deanna Fisher

Turning tragedy into hope.

Deanna Lindsey Fisher is a determined woman. A single working professional with three grown children of her own, Deanna decided she had the ability and the desire to do more with her life. The decision to become a foster parent was an easy one to make once she realized the extent of the need. "I really never thought I would do something like this," Deanna explains, "but when I went to foster care orientation and saw the video about these children, I knew I could do something to help."

Deanna's first foster child was a girl of seven. From the beginning, it was clear that this little girl had gone through a great deal in her relatively short life. Shy and withdrawn, the child had difficulty sleeping through the night. An older sibling had heavily influenced her, and now — on her own — she was very cautious and uncertain of the world around her. It took time and patience, but Deanna was successful in helping the child rebuild her self-confidence, which in turn made the girl more receptive and better able to establish rewarding relationships with the people in her life.

Every child is unique and requires special attention.

Since taking in her first foster child more than two years ago, Deanna has accepted the placement

of two teenage girls. Older children sometimes exhibit difficult behavior, such as stealing, lying, or hoarding food. Deanna believes that the best

way to deal with this kind of situation is to sit down with the entire family and work out a solution together. "This kind of behavior affects the family, and discussing it together makes us accountable to each other," Deanna says. "Establishing a relationship with these children and letting them know they can trust you is important." However, she insists you can't overstate the importance of setting boundaries for the children and providing them with the love and guidance they need to be successful.

Sometimes there are other factors that can influence how a child relates to a new environment. One of the girls in Deanna's care had a mental health diagnosis that required medication. When Deanna communicated her observations of the girl's behavior to the caseworker and the healthcare professional assigned to the case, the decision was made to alter her treatment. Through careful observation and a team-oriented approach, they were able to eventually eliminate the medication altogether. "We discovered that this girl was placed on medication as a way of dealing with her behavioral problems, which were a direct result of her environment," Deanna observes. "Instead of helping her, the drugs hindered her progress."

Support is essential to the foster care experience.

Being a foster parent is an around-the-clock commitment, so it is important to be able to reach

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out for support when times are tough or additional help is needed to overcome a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

Deanna's biological children have embraced their mother's decision to become a foster parent and give her assistance when called upon. In addition, her spirituality and the faith community have provided invaluable support. However, Deanna credits Idaho Department of Health and Welfare staff for making her feel like a valuable member of a team working towards a common goal. "I've had good experience working with my case workers," she says.

Deanna cites two examples that support that sentiment: "With my first girl, I thought it was important for her to be able to express her feelings about the experience to someone outside

our relationship, so I contacted her caseworker and suggested counseling. Within no time she had something set up for my foster daughter. And when I noticed she was reading below her grade level, I suggested a tutor, which was provided, as well."

Why become a foster parent?

According to Deanna, being a foster parent is not always an easy task: "These children come to you and they have problems, but given time you can work through those problems." When asked why she is a foster care provider, Deanna doesn't hesitate. "The need is there and the compassion in my heart is there," she says. "I know how they came to me and I can see what they have become — something so beautiful. These girls are like my own daughters, and I am so proud of them."

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For additional information about foster care or adoption, call the Idaho CareLine at 211 or go to www.idahochild.org